

PHOTO COURTESY TROY RILEY

Elaine Winquist, director of the Duxbury Free Library, works on restoring a house in New Orleans. Winquist's husband Peter also volunteered.

Local volunteers help in New Orleans

Fifteen First Parish members join rebuilding effort

By Lydia Mulvany
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After a week of hard work painting and working on houses in New Orleans, Cindy Ladd Fiorini of Duxbury is looking forward to going back next year with her church, First Parish Church of Duxbury. She thinks it could be an annual trip.

Fiorini enlisted the help of First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church members and organized the weeklong trip in late April for volunteers to help in the rebuilding of New Orleans. Fifteen volunteers from the ages of 16 to 68 roomed together in a church annex and worked on different projects throughout the city.

Fiorini said she had the idea because her son went to volunteer in New Orleans and ended up staying there.

"We went down there last year for a day, and it was clear to us both that there's an incredible amount of work to be done there, and that it's volunteers are who are rebuilding NNew Orleans now," she said.

Fiorini said the experience inspired her to sign her church up through the Volunteer Center, a consortium of three Unitarian churches in the

New Orleans area. She said she thought it was an unqualified success.

"It was a success for us as a group, living together in a small building all together, sharing one shower, without any problems or issues," she said. "We ended the week with an enormous amount of satisfaction and a greater understanding of what happened down there. We had an opportunity to talk to many of the people that experienced Katrina firsthand and lost so much, and listen to their stories, and work side-by-side."

"It was very powerful for us to witness the amount of destruction that is still down there."

Fiorini said she thought the group was inspired to go again.

"I think we're going to make it a yearly trip, and we like the idea of an intergenerational trip," she said. "We felt a big connection. People were very welcoming, and we hope to be able to forge some sort of a connection with them."

Troy Riley, another Duxbury resident who volunteered, said she too was inspired.

"We went to the Lower Ninth Ward, which was completely flooded. So many homes were lost. I had thought that it was a ghetto. I knew no

SEE NEW ORLEANS, PAGE 4

Crew from First Parish goes to work in New Orleans

FROM NEW ORLEANS, PAGE 1

better. It is not," she said. "It's a historic neighborhood, an African-American neighborhood. Many houses are historic, and 80 percent were owner-occupied. It was badly flooded and damaged, and many homes are still boarded up, and so many residents were scattered.

"It's heartbreaking," Riley said. "We were the fifth group over the last year to work on that house. Tiles for the bathroom and paint for the walls were donated by national companies and shipped. You got the

sense that this is our biggest national disgrace."

Riley worked with Marshfield resident Peter Nappellio priming and painting a house, which will be used by a large family trying to rebuild its life and bring back family members from abroad after the hurricane.

"What I got out of the trip was not only the volunteering, but meeting people there and hearing a lot of stories about the things you don't read in the newspaper, the story behind the story," said Nappellio, who is retired from the financial ser-

vices industry. "The media cover events as they happen, but a lot of people have kind of forgotten about New Orleans, and there are people there who don't have the financial means to get back on their feet."

Nappellio, who went to New Orleans with his wife Carol,

"It was one of the most rewarding weeks I've ever lived through. I don't think I can go on a vacation again and prop my feet up and do nothing."

Duxbury resident Troy Riley

said he saw a lot of homes sitting in disrepair and that public schools have not reopened, keeping away families that relocated after Hurricane Katrina.

"There is a lot of politics involved, and those families with children who have to relo-

cate to other states, they're not coming back until schools get rebuilt, and they're not rebuilding the schools," Nappellio said. "You have to feel sorry for people. But the greatest fear is if another hurricane comes along. So much was destroyed, so there's that much less to hold back the surge."

Nappellio and his wife are also affiliated with the American Red Cross disaster relief team. While in New Orleans, Nappellio said he mostly painted the home of a person who lost a home, then bought another at an auction, while another team from the church worked on putting

flooring into another house.

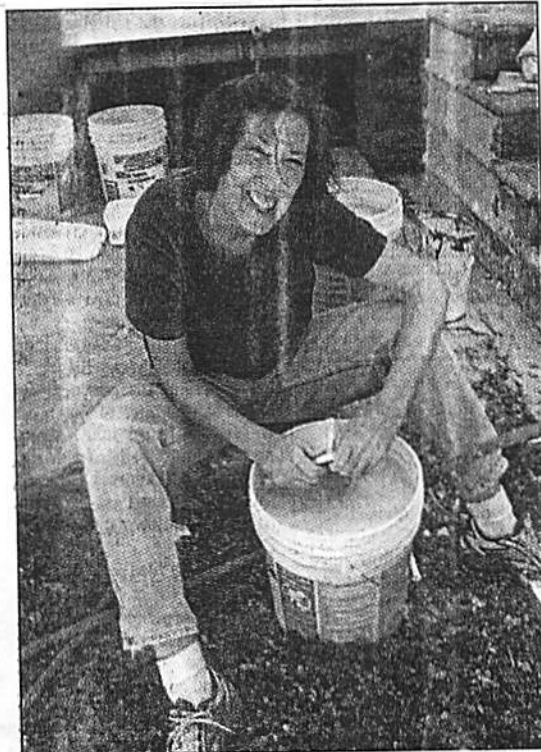
Riley said 88 volunteers from Massachusetts were part of the Unitarian volunteer organization there during the week of work.

"It was one of the most rewarding weeks I've ever lived through," she said. "I don't think I can go on a vacation again and prop my feet up and do nothing. I felt so euphoric at the end of it for having worked so hard, bonded so beautifully, learned so much and learned to appreciate New Orleans, where they're hanging on by their fingernails. And the country has forgotten."

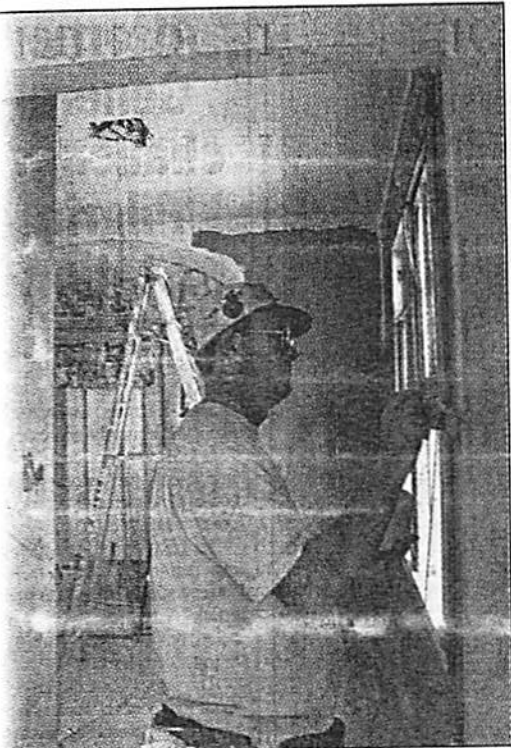


PHOTOS COURTESY TROY RILEY

The 15 volunteers from First Parish Church of Duxbury are pictured with the members of the family whose house was being restored in the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans. From left are Troy Riley of Plymouth, Mr. Melvin and Miss Pam of New Orleans, John Slechta, Cindy Ladd Florini and the Rev. Catherine Cullen of Duxbury, Jennifer LaPointe of Plymouth, Cindy Wilson, Peter Winkulst, Nancy Landgren and Elaine Winkulst of Duxbury; Peter Nappello of Marshfield; Conor Landgren of Duxbury; Miss Linda of New Orleans; David Murphy of Duxbury; and Marilyn and Bill Christmann of Pembroke.



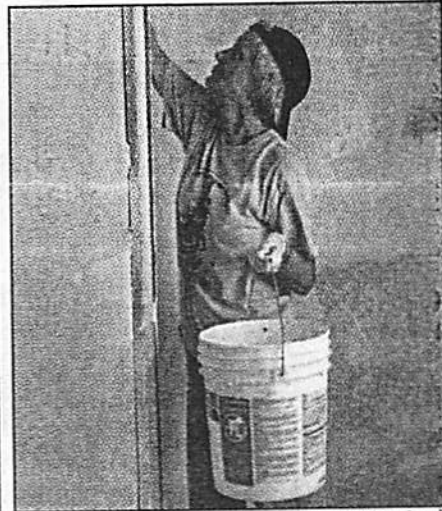
Cindy Wilson of Duxbury is one of 15 members of First Parish Church in Duxbury who volunteered in New Orleans.



David Murphy of Duxbury works on a house in the Lower Ninth Ward.



Peter Nappellio of Marshfield, left, Jennifer LaPointe of Plymouth and Marilyn Christmann of Pembroke work with the owner of a home being restored in the Lower Ninth Ward.



Marilyn Christmann of Pembroke paints the interior of a house in the Lower Ninth Ward.